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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABU DHABI 003204

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SUBJECT: UAE CENSUS RESULTS FINALLY RELEASED

Classified By: CLASSIFIED BY CDA MARTIN QUINN FOR REASONS 1.4 (b)&(d)

¶1. (C) Summary: On July 30, the UAEG finally released results of a census conducted months earlier. Minister of Economy Sheikha Lubna Al-Qasimi reported that as of December 6, 2005 the UAE's population was 4.1 million, up from 2.4 million in 1995. UAE nationals account for just over 20 percent of the population (of which 51 percent of those nationals are under age 20). Sheikha Lubna refuted the idea that the 80-20 ratio of foreigners to nationals constitutes an imbalance. The census estimated that 335,615 permanent residents were not counted for unexplained reasons, but were included in the 4.1 million total. Some sources question whether the overall numbers reflect the true population, or whether non-nationals were undercounted to show more robust numbers for UAE citizens. End Summary.

What the numbers show

¶2. (U) Minister of Economy Sheikha Lubna Al-Qasimi's July 30 press conference offered the following data:

--- 4,104,695: Overall population of the UAE as of December 6, 2005.

--- 335,615: "Non-nationals" not counted in the census (but included in the 4.1 million total population).

--- 824,921: UAE nationals counted in the census.

--- 2,944,159: Non-UAE nationals counted in the census.

--- Male/female ratio of UAE nationals is 50.7% / 49.3% (418,057 males / 406,864 females).

--- Male/female ratio of non-UAE nationals is 72.3% / 27.7% (2,128,986 males / 815,173 females).

--- The male/female ratio overall is 67.6% / 32.4 % (2,547,043 males / 1,222,037 females).

--- 51.1% of UAE nationals are under the age of 20, while 38.1% are under the age of 14.

¶3. (U) The census also counted buildings (336,815) and housing units (863,860), the majority of which are located in the Emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Population breakdown among the seven Emirates is as follows:

--- 1,292,119: Abu Dhabi.

--- 2,200,309: Dubai

--- 724,859: Sharjah

--- 197,571: Ras Al Khaimah

--- 189,849: Ajman
--- 118,617: Fujairah
--- 45,756: Um Al Quwain

Dominant Trends

¶4. (C) The UAEG has felt some pressure to affirm, through this census, that the ratio of UAE nationals is on the rise. In 1995, the ratio was about 15%. Current data suggests that a high birth rate (estimated at 15.5% in recent years) is responsible for a significant increase in the local UAE national population, with over half of the population now under the age of 20. The foreign population has been bolstered by an expanding economy and increased demand for construction labor. In fact, many local contacts assume that the number of workers -- particularly in the booming construction industry -- is in fact larger than the census accounts for. Some suggest that the delay in releasing the data may have given the UAE time to manipulate the figures to indicate a higher ratio of nationals.

¶5. (C) Sheikha Lubna's announcement also cites an estimated 335,615 permanent residents that were not counted for unspecified administrative reasons (although they are included in the announced total population and factored into the UAE/non-UAE ratio. On August 2, Abdul Qader Al Masawi, Acting Director of the Statistics Department in the Ministry of Economy told EconOff that any person legally employed in the UAE, including laborers and domestic servants, was counted in the census. (Comment: It is unlikely that the huge number of construction workers and domestic servants in the UAE were thoroughly counted in the census. According to the Embassies of the seven primary source countries: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Nepal and the

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Philippines, the estimated total number of people working in the UAE as laborers and domestic servants alone is almost three million. Prior to launching the 2005 census, some estimated that the UAE population was over five million. End comment.)

¶6. (SBU) Regarding the roughly 20/80 mix of citizens to expatriate residents, Sheikha Lubna noted that "The UAE has been smart in attracting economic and human capital in terms of intelligence and creativity. It is in our interest to continue our strong economic growth." She also said she did not see the ratio as an imbalance.

¶7. (SBU) An expanded -- and very young -- citizenry raises challenges for the UAEG. On July 31, English language daily Gulf News quoted Dr. Mohammad Amerah, an Abu Dhabi economist, as saying, "The huge growth in the number of Emirati youths may put pressure on government expenditures for education, healthcare and other services." He also said there is an urgent need to create new employment opportunities for the large number of UAE nationals under the age of 20.

Delayed announcement

¶8. (C) On April 5, EconOff met with Majid Sultan Al-Ali, Director of the Central Statistical Department, regarding the anticipated census results, which had been expected to be released in March. Al-Ali did not provide any concrete data, but mentioned that Sheikha Lubna had the census figures and would "release them shortly." He did not know the reason for the delay, but said he expected the new figures to be lower than previously anticipated. Al-Ali explained that the results would be lower because the UAEG used the "de facto method" of counting persons physically present in the country during the 1995 census including many temporary visitors, but used the "de jure method" in 2005, which counts permanent residents, as opposed to only those physically present at the time of the census.

¶9. (C) Anticipating concerns about the validity of the results, Al-Ali stressed that one should not believe "outsiders" who may argue the 2005 census figures are too low. He also said that the census figures could be off by as much as 5 to 10% to account for people who were not counted. Al-Ali specifically gave the example of not being able to count the ambassador because "census officials cannot approach her house since it is surrounded by guards." Post is aware of several other foreigners who also were not personally counted.

Tabloid cartoon

¶10. (U) On August 6, the Arabic language weekly tabloid Emaratalyoum, published a cartoon which depicts two UAE nationals conversing. The first speaker says, "Have you heard the recent statistics of our country's population census? It says that we represent 21%. Can you imagine?" The second speaker responds, "Thank God, because whoever looks at our streets would think we are only 5%."

¶11. (C) Comment: The UAEG may be manipulating the census data by publishing results which are lower than the true expatriate population of the UAE. For political reasons, the UAE is not likely to acknowledge that the percentage of UAE nationals has decreased since 1995, which is possibly the case. Based on the final numbers, it does not appear likely that all of the estimated three million Asian laborers and domestic workers in the UAE are accounted for in the 4.1 million figure. If the UAEG did undercount, its low population estimates may cause problems in planning future services for the continuous stream of expatriate labor in the UAE -- a stream which is not likely to decrease as the construction and economic boom continues. Low estimates could also mean poor services for laborers in spartan worker camps (where many live as squatters with little infrastructure), more commuters on crowded highways than planners anticipated, and crowded schools and health care facilities. End comment.
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